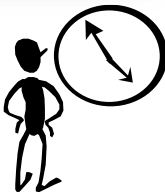


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Time of Assembly



Sunday:	
Bible Study	9:00 a.m.
Worship	10:00 a.m.
(Or every other week)	
Bible Study	4:00 p.m.
Worship	5:00 p.m.
Wednesday:	
Bible Study	7:00 p. m.

The Qualifications of Preachers

By David R. Pharr

Twice Paul refers to Timothy, as a “man of God.”

“But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness”

(I Timothy 6:11).

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (II Timothy 3:16f).

Timothy was a preacher working with the church at Ephesus. These texts emphasize qualifications in character and equipment for the work with which he was charged — evangelism and ministry (II Timothy 4:5). Included in his duties was recognizing men who themselves might be trained and qualified for ministry.

Among churches of Christ one who regularly stands in the pulpit is typically referred to as “the preacher,” “the evangelist,” or “the minister.” It should be understood, of course, that others than those who devote full time may and should be involved in the same activities. Everyone who knows the truth can share it with others. The term “minister” means the same as “servant” and all Christians serve Christ and one another. In some passages, it appears to apply to a special role in the service of the gospel (II Corinthians 11:8; Colossians 1:23; I Timothy 4:6; II Timothy 4:5). (See Vine’s, 411.) It is biblical proper to refer to a full-time preacher as a “minister,” but it should not be intended to imply a clerical rank. Neither should it be a mere substitute for the denominational custom of calling a preacher “the Pastor,” or “the Reverend.”

The two references to a preacher such as Timothy as a “man of God” seem especially significant in view of the frequent use of the term in the Old Testament. It commonly re-

ferred to a man sent with a message from God, that is, a prophet. Over and over in the books of the Kings, Elijah and Elisha are both named “the man of God.” Though in a broad sense, every person (men or women) who served God was a “man” (person) of God, obviously the term had a special application to these prophets and some others. They were called to a special mission. Paul’s use of the same suggests that he wanted Timothy to know he had been chosen for a special mission. John R. W. Stott’s comments on II Timothy 3:17 seem worthy of consideration.

Indeed, Scripture is the chief means that God employs to bring the “man of God” to maturity. Who is intended by the expression is not explained. It may be a general term for every Christian since the words themselves mean no more than “the man who belongs to God” (NEB). On the other hand, it was an Old Testament title of respect applied to some of God’s spokesmen . . . and Paul specifically addressed Timothy by this phrase in his first letter (I Timothy 6:11). It may therefore refer here to men called to positions of responsibility in the church, and especially to ministers whose task it is, under the authority of Scripture, to teach and refute, to reform and discipline (103; cf. Jamison, Fausset, and Brown, loc. cit.).

“Timothy joins the ranks of the great saints of old simply because he is a faithful Christian and a gospel preacher” (Wheeler 39). This is not to suggest that preachers belong to a clergy class. Being a preacher does not make one more spiritual than other faithful Christians. Being in full-time church work does not mean that one has a special connection with God. Jesus bluntly denounces those who relish titles and use them for their own advantage (Matthew 23:1-12; cf. Ephesians 3:8; I Corinthians 15:9). Balanced against this, however, it should be understood that certain ones have specific opportunities and duties and, because of their work, deserve respect. At the same time, those who aspire to the preaching ministry must understand its gravity and the necessity of maintaining the necessary qualifications.

Called to Preach

Churches of Christ have generally avoided the expression “called to preach.” This is because of the unscriptural and ridiculous claims sometimes made by preachers in various denominations. Some have said that God had literally spoken to them. Others tell of a dream, a vision, or some sign. One story was of a farmer working in the field. He said he saw clouds in the sky that had formed the letters “G P.” He was sure the initials meant “Go Preach.” Someone else said, “Maybe they meant “Go Plow.” Whether men who make such claims are sincere or pretenders, the fact is that we have never encountered a man who boasted of such a call who actually preached the true gospel. Faithful men of God are not called to preach by dreams, voices, mysterious signs, or inexplicable feelings. Instead, there is a standing call for faithful and capable men who are grounded in apostolic doctrine and practice.

Whether to become a preacher is something one must decide within himself, but it is not something he should decide without seeking guidance from God, as well as the wisdom and advice of others. Paul was called to be an apostle by miraculous means, as were prophets of the Old Testament, e. g., Jeremiah, and Isaiah. The Lord spoke directly to them. In this post-miraculous age, God speaks to men through the Scriptures. The charge to “preach the word” was given to Timothy because he was qualified. Even babes in Christ can share the truth they know, but only mature men are ready to be preachers. This assumes a solid foundation in all aspects of biblical doctrine, with particular attention to what is said about challenges, duties, dangers, and rewards for ministers of the gospel. While it would be presumptuous to set some required standard of biblical literacy before one can decide to preach, it is likewise presumptuous for someone to decide to be a preacher before he has studied carefully what God will expect of him.

God also calls men into preaching by his providence. Believers do not see the unfolding of life’s circumstances as mere accidents of fate. Batsell Barrett Baxter begins his autobiography with the belief that God has a plan for every life. He explains that God’s plan for each person may not be as clearly defined as in the case of Saul of Tarsus, “But we believe that if we yield our lives to God’s will, He will open doors of opportunity in very natural, unspectacular ways through which each of us will play an important part in His plan” (8). The Lord in his providence may set before one an open door into the ministry of the word. It might be an opportunity for education. It might be the needs of a mission field. It might be changes in the family, economic circumstances, encouragement from others, or numerous other things. The point is that providence may be moving one in this direction. Caution should be exercised in how we interpret providence, but God-given opportunities should not be ignored. The parable of the talents shows that ability plus opportunity equals responsibility. Has God given one the talent and opportunity to be a gospel preacher? “When the world’s need and God’s grace have filled one’s soul, the time will come when the sublime charge to ‘preach the word’ may rise off the page and take hold of a man’s heart” (Pharr 17ff).

Qualifications

“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (II Timothy 2:2). Timothy’s teaching ministry was to everyone at Ephesus. The instruction of the text, however, indicates the tutelage of selected men to prepare them for like work. Such must be “faithful” men. They are to be instructed in the apostolic truth. They must be “able,” capable, to communicate that truth to others.

All aspects of godly conduct, which apply to any Christian, should be evident, even exemplary in a man of God. Unlike some professions in the secular world, the qualifications of a man of God directly involve his character. One who would instruct others in righteousness must give particular attention to how his attitude, manners, and

activities influence others. He must “*be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity*” (II Timothy 2:20f). Preaching as a profession has an unsavory reputation in much of society. Certainly, it is unfair for the name of a good man to be stained by the grime found on other men’s characters, especially those who portray themselves as preachers. In morals and ethics, God demands no more of a preacher than is demanded of any brother or sister, but the realities of society demand particular care for a gospel preacher that his integrity, speech, manners, appearance, moral uprightness, etc., be unquestioned.

Preachers must be competent to teach (“*apt to teach*” cf. II Timothy 2:24; cf. I Timothy 3:2). There is no standard by which all can be evaluated as to the ability to communicate. Some are “silver-tongued,” and some are “dull of speech.” It’s the message, not the skill of the messenger that counts. All are not five-talent men, but one-talent men are not excused from doing the best they can and striving to improve. For example, there is no excuse for bad grammar if one has had an opportunity to learn grammar. Phillips Brooks’ famous definition of preaching as “truth through personality” suggests a variety of skills and manners. There is no single style, no uniform temperament, no exclusive approach. Communication involves understanding not only what needs to be said, but the audience to whom it is said.

Brethren involved in brotherhood schools of preaching frequently cite Paul’s instruction to Timothy to define their mission. While there have been some marvelous examples of preachers who were largely self-educated, most will profit more by regimented training under experienced teachers. In committing to them the apostolic doctrine, Timothy was teaching them, but of necessity, they must in themselves have a desire to learn. A gospel preacher should be a student who never graduates, who has a never ending thirst to know more—more of the Bible, more of how to communicate, more about answering errors, more about winning souls, and more about being a better person. “First principles” are not enough (Hebrews 5:12ff). One who teaches others wants to bring them to his level of understanding, but what happens when they get there and he doesn’t know how to take them higher? It has been said that a good preacher preaches from the overflow, meaning he has first been filling himself with Scripture. “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly*” (Colossians 3:16). “*A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things*” (Matthew 12:35). Study is more than putting together a sermon outline. It is building a treasure from which rich things can be shared with hearers. A gospel preacher should approach the Book, and related books, as where gold can be found by hard digging. Thus, “*Give attention to reading*” (I Timothy 4:13). Paul, in prison and with not long to live, asked Timothy to bring him “*the books, and especially the parchments*” (II Timothy 4:13). The other side of II Timothy 2:15 is that a preacher ought to be ashamed if he has not learned to handle the word of God correctly.

Men of God

Gospel preachers hold no special rank by virtue of having had a special “call” (miraculous) from God, nor because they have been “ordained” or “licensed” by the church. Their qualification as to knowledge is to the degree have learned the word of God and its application to the souls of men. Their qualification as to competence is to whether they are able to “*reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*” (II Timothy 4:2). Their qualification as to character is faithfulness. Society may recognize them as professionals because of their special involvement in the work of the church and its connection to their livelihood, but they are God’s men. A man of God is “*a vessel unto honor, sanctified and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work*” (II Timothy 2:21).

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Do What You are Able to Do

By Andy Sochor

Those who are conscientious Christians will have a desire to do all that they can in service to God. And as we see the needs that exist around us, it is natural for us to want to provide help for all that we can.

However, the reality is that we cannot provide all of the help that we may want to provide. No matter how diligent we are, there will always be more good works that we wish we could do. This can be discouraging, even though our hearts may be in the right place.

Therefore, it is good to remember what the apostle Paul told the brethren in Corinth: “*For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have*” (II Corinthians 8:12). The context was about the Corinthians providing financial assistance to needy Christians in Jerusalem. However, the principle contained in this verse applies to us in various situations today.

God wants us to be ready to do good and judges us based on our ability. In other words, we do not need to worry about what we cannot do; instead, we need to focus on what we can do. So do what you are able to do. We can surely think of many good things that we might desire to do in service to God or to help others. While we should strive to do all that we can, we also need to recognize our own limitations and simply focus on using our abilities to make the most of our opportunities.